

Grace Protestant Episcopal Church
1041 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W.
Georgetown
Washington
District of Columbia

440
HABS No. DC-101

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Washington Planning And Service Center
1730 North Lynn Street
Arlington, Virginia

GRACE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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Location: 1041 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C.

Present Owner: Episcopal Diocese of Washington

Present Occupant: Grace Church

Present Use: Sanctuary

Statement of Significance: The "child" of two early existing Georgetown Episcopal Parishes, Grace Parish was founded in 1855 as a mission church for boatmen and workers from the adjacent C. & O. Canal. With the financial support of District Governor Henry D. Cooke, the existing adifca was constructed in 1866-67; with major repairs in 1923, the structure has remained practicelly unaltered to this dste. Although the architect is unknown, Grace Church bears a striking resemblance to the nearby Oak Hill Chapel designed by James Renwick in 1850.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: The following information is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which Grace Church was built. The references ere to the records found in the Recorder of Deeds Office, District of Columbia. The building is located in Square 1189, lots 825, 37, 38, 39; Old Square 19, lots 41, 42:
 - 1812 Deed of partition June 17, 1812 recorded October 14, 1812 in Liber AD folio 319
Thomas Peter (receives lot 37)
David Peter (receives lot 38)
George Peter (receives lot 39)
Margaret Dick
 - 1835 Deed May 14, 1835 recorded May 21, 1835 in Liber WB 56 folio 156
Richard Smith
To
Thomas Corcoran
Sale and conveyance for default under trust for Thomas Peter dated September 16, 1829.
Sold September 18, 1829 for \$348.87.

- 1836 Deed in Trust March 10, 1836 recorded April 21,
1836 in Liber WB 61 folio 82
William Ramsay et ux Elizabeth
James Peter et ux Susan H.
George Peter
James B. Beverly et ux Jane
heirs and devisees of David Peter, deceased
To
John Marbury
In trust to sell and divide residue among grantors.
- 1839 Deed May 18, 1839 recorded June 3, 1839
in Liber WB 75 folio 230
George W. Peter, Trustee
To
Farmers and Mechanics Bank of Georgetown
- 1842 Deed August 6, 1842 recorded September 17, 1842 in
Liber WB 95 folio 24
Thomas Corcoran et ux Emily
To
John Carter
- 1844 Deed June 6, 1844 recorded June 8, 1844 in
Liber WB 109 folio 193
John Marbury, Trustee
To
John Carter
- 1844 Will of John Carter probated July 2, 1850
in Will Book 6 p. 300
- 1864 Deed December 5, 1864 recorded December 23, 1864 in
Liber NCT 51 folio 257
George W. Peter et ux Jane B.
To
George Waters
- 1865 Deed September 16, 1865 recorded November 27, 1865 in
Liber RMH 3 folio 226
George Waters
To
Henry D. Cooke
- 1866 Deed January 17, 1866 recorded January 18, 1866 in
Liber RMH 10 folio 114
John Davidson
William C. Magee
Samuel Cropley
A. H. Pickrell

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Benjamin R. Mayfield
William F. Seymour
William H. Tenney
Philip T. Berry
Trustees of Farmers and Mechanics Bank of
Georgetown.

To
Henry D. Cooke

1867 Deed June 7, 1867 recorded July 29, 1867 in
Liber D 11 folio 455
John Marbury
Robert Dunlop

Trustees of estate of John Carter
To
John Carter O'Neal, heir and devisee

1867 Deed April 13, 1867 recorded August 6, 1867 in
Liber ECE 11 folio 458
John Carter O'Neal, 96th Reg't, English Army
To
Henry D. Cooke

1873 Bankruptcy - Jay Cooke and Company

1874 Assignment for benefit of creditors: February 6,
1874 recorded March 28, 1874 in
Liber 745 folio 206
Jay Cooke et al of Jay Cooke and Company
To
Edwin M. Lewis

1876 January 28, 1876. Declaration is that plaintiff
sues defendants to recover possession of lots 37,
to 42 in Peter's Square, Georgetown, said lots
having a front of about 120 feet on High Street,
between South Street and Second Alley, and run-
ning back 207 feet 4 1/2 inches, with the church
buildings thereon, in which he claims the
fee simple, and of which he was seized on January 1,
1874, when ejected by defendants; that plaintiff
was appointed trustee of said bankruptcy in District
Court of the United States for Eastern District of
Pennsylvania, and as such, claims said property
as aforesaid January 28, 1876 - Defendants sum-
moned personally.

Edwin M. Lewis, trustee of estate of
Jay Cooke
William G. Moorehead
Harris C. Fahnstock
Henry D. Cooke
Pitt Cooke

George C. Thomas

James A. Garland

Jay Cooke, Jr. partners, trading as Jay Cooke and
Company, bankruptcy Henry D. Cooke
vs.

The Vestry of St. John's Parish, Georgetown, D.C.

The Vestry of Christ Church Parish

The Vestry of Grace Church Parish, of same place.

1876 Deed November 15, 1876 recorded December 30, 1876 in
Liber 843 folio 76

Henry D. Cooke et ux Laura S.

To

Edwin M. Lewis, trustee of estate of Jay Cooke & Co.

2. Date of erection: Church, 1866-67; Rectory, 1895;
Parish Hall, 1898. The following excerpts from the
Washington Star, dates as noted, are invaluable as a
"running account" of the Church's physical growth:

Washington Star

26 December, 1865

"THE MISSION PARISH - This very interesting Church
established by the efforts of St. John's and Christ's
churches, and now ready to be established as a parish
with Rev. Mr. Brown as pastor, began on Friday to per-
form its Christmas work for the encouragement of its
members ... the Chapel was very tastefully decorated."

Washington Star

9 January, 1866

"The High Street Episcopal Church held its first
missionary anniversary of its Sabbath School on Sun-
day the 7th inst."

Washington Star

14 July, 1866

"A NEW CHURCH - The Grace Church Parish of the Episcopal
denomination is about erecting a commodious church edi-
fice to be used in future instead of the little wooden
chapel with which the parish began as a mission a short
time ago. The site of the edifice adjoins that of the
chapel on the hill between the canal and Water, High and
Congress Streets, and is an excellent location for such
a church. The building, we understand, is to be about
twice the size of the present chapel, and designed for
an ample audience chamber, rooms for Bible classes, the

sabbath school, and a library for the Rector. It is to be constructed of blue gniess from the Potomac quarries, of which large quantities suitable for building purposes can be obtained within a short distance of the town, and the style of architacture true Gothic. Rev. J. Eastburn Brown, the rector of the parish, is highly esteemed by our citizens as well of other secta aa his own [sic]; and his success in promoting the interests of his paris [sic], receives their wsrmeest congratulations. The foundation is being prepared and tha corner stone will be laid with appropriate ceremonies in about two weeks."

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Washington Star
31 July, 1866

"THE CORNER STONE LAID - As we snnounced yestarday, the ceremony of laying the corner stone of the Grace Church edifice was performed at 6 o'clock. The rectors of St. John's, Christ's, St. Alban's, and Grace Churches, the trustees of Grace Church and s number of members and friends of the church, assembled at the Chapel, and proceeded to the foundation of the Church, whare the services were begun by Rev. J. Eastburn Brown, Rector of Grace Church, with the exhortstion and prayer. Geo. Water, Esq. of the trustees, announced the contents of the box to be enclosed withing the stone ss follows; A Bible, Book of Common Prayer, a Journal of the Dio-cassn Convention, an epitome of the history of the Pariah, a copy of the Episcopalian, two of the daily papers of the district, some coins and specimens of fractional currency. The stone was lsid by the rector of the church according to the established form, which was followed with s prsyer by Rev. Mr. Chew, rector of St. Alban's, and appropristely addreased by the Rev. Messrs. Tillinghast end Williams, rectors of St. John's snd Christ'a Churches, and the company wss dismisaed after prayer with the benediction by the rector of St. Albsn's. We mentioned the preparations in progress some days ago for this occasion. The church will be quite an ornament to that portion of the town, and there can be no doubt of its success in the estblishment of a permanent congregation."

Washington Star
26 December, 1866

"At Grace Church (the new congregation of which Rev. J. E. Brown is rector) the services were quite inter-esting. The little Chapel, which will be occupied until their hsndsome church, now in the process of

erection, shall be completed, was tastefully decorated, great pains having been taken..."

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Washington Star
20 April, 1867

"NEW CHURCH - The new Church edifice built for the Grace Church Parish (formerly known as the PE Mission Chapel) will be opened tomorrow, Easter Day. In the morning the Easter Services; in the afternoon, the Sunday School will celebrate the occasion appropriately; at night a sermon, aided to the event, will be preached by the Rev N P Tillinghast. This beautiful and convenient church is the gift of a Christian Gentleman, Mr. Henry D. Cooke, whose praise is in all the churches. The building is of Gothic architect [sic], finished with great taste, but not at the expense of comfort or utility. The entire floor is carpeted, and the seats (which are all to be always free) are covered with rich cushions. The furniture in the chancel and the rector's rooms is gotten up with so much good taste that one need not be told that the wife of the benefactor has had to do with these. The Sunday School room, which will be finished by next Sunday, is just the place for class teaching, having the good old fashioned semi-circle seat in the main school room, and separate apartments for adult Bible classes and the infant class. Tomorrow, therefore, will be a joyful Easter, to the congregation and their numerous friends."

Washington Star
26 December 1867

"AT GRACE CHURCH (P E) - the services were the regular morning prayer, ante communion and collect &c, for Christmas Day, and an appropriate sermon by the Rector, Rev. J. Eastburn Brown. The beautiful new church was handsomely decorated with cedar and box and attendance was larger than usual."

Washington Star
28 January, 1895

"GRACE CHURCH RECTORY - The pastor and vestrymen of Grace Church are maturing their plans for the erection of a rectory. In all probability the house will be erected on a part of the present church property, between 31st 32nd, K and M Streets. The trustees have \$3,000 cash on hand for the purpose. Two-thirds of this amount was given the church through the will of the late

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Miss Gough, and the balance is what has been saved by the congregation, added to the gifts of Messrs. John Marbury, Geo. T. Dunlop and others, amounting to something over \$500. The church managers are also considering the improvements of the church proper. The proposed rectory will not be an elaborate building but one designed principally to accommodate.

Grace Church is doing a good work among the surrounding poor. It is in the midst of one of the poorest sections of Georgetown and in touch with the most deserving."

Washington Star
5 February, 1895

"AFFAIRS IN GEORGETOWN - The Grace Church vestry have appointed Messrs. J.O. Caton, Louis Goodrich and Wm. McShay to select plans and make the necessary arrangements for the construction of the new parsonage that for some weeks has been under practical discussion. It has been decided to locate the house on line with the church and to the north - the original site having been abandoned on account of the obstruction that a building thereon would offer to the free view of the house of worship. In locating the parsonage on the church grounds the principal object in view is to have the pastor in the midst of his people."

3. Architect: Unknown. The remarkable similarity between Grace Church and the Renwick Chapel in Oak Hill Cemetery supports supposition that James Renwick may have been involved in the design of Grace Church. As the benefactor, Governor Cooke, was involved in the Jay Cooke firm, it is not improbable that he may have had contact with Renwick, who had designed many ecclesiastical structures in New York, among them Grace Church (1846) and St. Patrick's Cathedral (competition 1853, cornerstone laid 1858). If Renwick was not directly involved with the building, it is safe to assume that the architect was profoundly influenced by his Oak Hill Cemetery Chapel, and the design of the Church indicates execution by an architect of professional maturity.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: None known.
5. Notes on alterations and additions: Building permits and various minor alterations and repairs are listed in the District Building Permit records (District Building) for the period from 1895 through 1954.

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6. Important old views: None known.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

1. The following have been extracted from the Georgetowner, November 14, 1957;

"On the left of the altar is the lectern presented as a memorial to Colonel Jamea Longstreet, the son of the famous Confederate General, by the Colonel's family. The hymn boards are memorials to early devoted members while the pipe organ was given 'in memoriam' to Mr. and Mrs. Fulton Lewis, Sr., in 1950 (when the church was remodeled) by their children, Fulton Lewis Jr., General Millard Lewis, and Mrs. Knox Cockrell."

Rev. M. Mills Perkins came to Grace Church in 1927.

Began as a mission for sailors from ships in Georgetown's harbor and for canal boatmen.

Started in 1855 by three members of the Vestry of St. John's Episcopal Church of Georgetown. Messrs. Thomas, Rittenhouse and Ridgely.

Mission was opened on "Brick Hill" in Peter Square. A small frame chapel was erected at southeast corner of present property - regular services maintained by students from the Virginia Theological Seminary for several years. Mr. Tyng, one of the students, and son of the Rev. Stephen A. Tyng (a former rector of St. John's Church) was the first to hold Sunday School in the building.

During the Civil War, in 1863, the Rev. J. Eastburn Brown became the first regular rector in charge.

In the early 1860's, Governor Henry D. Cooke of the District of Columbia, and at one time a vestryman of St. John's, became interested in the mission and at a cost of \$25,000, he made possible (in 1866) the present Grace Church building. The cornerstone was laid on June 29, 1866, and the building was completed April 20, 1867. On the next day which was Easter, the first service was held. The parish was organized and admitted by the Diocesan Convention in Baltimore as "Grace Parish" in May, 1866 the parish boundaries being defined at the time.

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For several years, all expenases of the mission had been borne by St. John's Church of Georgetown. Later, the work was taken over by Christ Church of Georgetown. In 1866, Grace Church became an independent parish.

Grace Church was built by Henry D. Cooke, a member of Messrs. Jay Cooke & Co. (at a critical time in the Civil War this company placed the bonds which enabled the U.S. to pass through a financial strain). Because Governor Cooke omitted to execute and record the Deed of Property before the failure of his firm in 1873, the Trustees of the bankrupt firm of Jay Cooke and Company endeavored to confiscate and wrest the property from the possession of the Vestry of Grace Parish, Georgetown. A bill of Equity was filed in 1876 by the Vestry against the Trustees of Jay Cooke and Company. The Decree asked for was issued by the Supreme Court of the District on April 11, 1877, and the property was conveyed to the Trustees of the Church as contemplated by Gov. Cooke. The Decree contained the Unexecuted Deed of Trust and removed the invalidity due to its lack of Mr. Cooke's signature. Thus, the title of the Grace Church property is unquestioned.

The rectory was built in 1895 and the parish hall was built three years later in 1898.

First rector Rev. J. Eastburn Brown, 1863-1871.

Twenty-one rectors since that time [to 1957].

2. From "Report of the Genealogical Records Committee, District of Columbia, D.A.R.," volume 56, 1939-1940 (unpublished typescript in D.A.R. Library, Washington, D.C.)

"It was about the year 1855 that three vestrymen of St. John's Church started a mission on 'Brickyard Hill', on the canal, in the heart of what was then known as Peter's Square. When the work had proved its value, the Rev. Henderson Suter took charge of the mission and organized a Sunday School. For several years a group of students from the Virginia Seminary acted as the lay readers, among them the son of the Rev. Stephen Tyng, former rector of St. John's.

"A small frame chapel was first erected on the spot where the present granite cross in memory of the soldiers of the World War now stands. In 1866 the church was made a separate parish, known as Grace Parish. The present beautiful building was built by Henry D. Cooke, Governor of the District of Columbia. It was finished in time for a service on Easter Day 1867.

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"The support of the parish from 1874 had gradually become a charge on Christ Church with some little assistance from a few members of St. John's. It was largely through the constant and earnest appeals of Dr. Stuart of Christ Church that the work was kept up.

"But in 1892 the Rev. George Howell became rector, and under him the church became financially independent. He also built the rectory, and a few years later the parish hall was erected. In 1922 extensive alterations and improvements were made to the church and parish hall. This church began as a mission and social service work had always been vital to it. At least fifty percent of the present rector's work is among families with no church affiliation. There is a large and very active Sunday School, and the parish while not numerically very large has a spiritual influence that extends far beyond its bounds." (Extract from the Washington Diocese, March, 1939, Vol 7, No. 3, p.5)

From Rose Truxler Mitchell: "Parish register of Grace P.E. Church, Georgetown." 1963 (unpublished typescript in D.A.R. Library, Washington, D.C.)

"At the lower end of Wisconsin Avenue in Georgetown, District of Columbia, on a hill formerly known as Brickyard Hill, which rise between the historic Chesapeake and Ohio Canal and the Potomac River, stands Grace P.E. Church, practically unnoticed by Georgetown visitors and the busy, noisy traffic which rushes past its doors.

"Grace Church is built of stone and has a brick parish hall attached. Nearby is a brick rectory, and in the large churchyard with its well-kept green lawn stands a massive granite cross, a memorial to those who sacrificed their lives in World War I.

"Not a great deal has been written on the history of Grace Church, but this index would not be complete without some attempt to gather a few substantial facts about the church. Much of the information on the

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following paragraphs was found in a paper in the church archives entitled 'Sketch and History of Grace P.E. Church, Georgetown, D.C. as compiled from records by Reverend Henry L. Durrant 1855-1924.'

"Before the building of the present structure 'on Brickyard Hill in Peters Square' and on the site of the granite cross there was originally a small, frame chapel built about 1854 through the generosity of Messrs. Thomas, Rittenhouse and Ridgely. These gentlemen were vestrymen of St. John's Episcopal Church in Georgetown and they saw the need of a church to serve the sailors on the waterfront and those persons who followed the canal. Therefore, the first chapel was built at their expense.

"The church history tells us that at one time Rev. Henderson Suter, at a later date rector of Christ Church in Alexandria established a Sunday School in connection with the mission and that students from the Theological Seminary in Alexandria served as lay readers.

"To better serve the growing Georgetown Parish District, the present church was built by Governor Henry D. Cooke of the District of Columbia, a member of the banking firm of Messrs. Jay Cooke & Co. Governor Cooke in 1865 purchased several lots on which the church property stands. Because Governor Cooke did not execute a deed of the property to Grace Church before the failure of Messrs. Jay Cooke & Co. in 1873, there was considerable legal difficulty before possession of the property was gained by the Vestry of Grace Parish Georgetown, D.C. The matter was taken to court through a Bill of Equity filed by the Vestry the "Fourth day of March 1876," and a decree containing the 'unexecuted Deed of Trust' was issued April 11, 1877.

"Another critical period in the history of Grace Parish (no date given) when it was about to close its doors on account of lack of funds to meet expenses, was turned by Mr. Alfred I. DuPont of Wilmington, Delaware, who came to the rescue of the new rector with a substantial gift of money.

"The days of navigation on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal have long since passed, and warehouses, gravel plants and superhighways now follow the shores of the Potomac River. However, in spite of the changing times Grace P.E. Church on its peaceful hill in Georgetown

continues to serve those who seek inspiration and fellowship within its gates."

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Source material contributed by
Mrs. C.E. Sunderlin
3036 P Street, N.W.
Washington, D. C.

Prepared by Dr. James Philip Noffsinger
Architect, National Park Service
and
Thomas R. Martinson
Student Assistant Architect
National Park Service
September 7, 1966

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Hidden well back from the street, Grace Church has escaped the ravages of time as well as the attention of passers-by. Comparatively small in size, this elegant little Gothic Revival church remains nearly unaltered since its construction one century ago.

Although handsome of exterior, the architectural forte of Grace Church is in its excellent interior detailing; the boldly curved gallery, collar-braced roof, and east stained glass lancets are among the most noteworthy elements of the interior.

2. Condition of fabric: Generally good; although not exceptionally well maintained, both exterior and interior fabrics show little sign of wear and almost no indication of physical damage (only a break in the plaster between south chancel lancets and a general deterioration to the sandstone trim are exceptions).

B. Technical Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 38'-8" (three-bay front) x approximately 70' (five-bay side). Two stories.
2. Foundations: Granite; coursed rubble masonry construction.
3. Wall construction: Granite; coursed rubble and ashlar masonry construction. 2' buttresses project 2'-6" from wall, are two-stage with beveled stone caps.
4. Openings:

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- a. Doorways and doors: All doorways are framed by (apparently) native sandstone which is composed of aggregate and mica; the stone is not very stable for construction purposes and is the only deteriorating element of the exterior fabric.

Four-paneled wooden doors at either side of narthex (on west elevation) are set within 4'-2" (north) and 4'-0" (south) masonry openings under segmental pointed arches and three-pane transoms. Pointed arch aperture of 5'-6 1/2" masonry opening frames more elaborate wooden six-paneled central door.

Central doorway opens into narthex, ancillary doorways into ground floor areas.

- b. Windows and shutters: Upper paired lancet windows are single-hung wooden sash, sandstone sills, set under pointed arches. Leaded glass is light amber in color. One pane on south elevation is painted in script, "G E S 1900."

Lower windows are essentially six-over-six light although placement is such that they are in actuality ten-over-eight light. These windows are set under segmental pointed arches with slightly projecting plain keystones.

Three-pane side windows on west elevation are set under pointed trefoil arches; their placement indicates position of gallery stairs within.

Large eastern window is composed of two pointed trefoil lancets below a quatrefoil, all of which are set within a pointed arch.

5. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Gable roof approximately 45°-50° pitch; ridge runs east-west; slate-covered.
- b. Framing: Wooden framing is reminiscent of English Gothic collar-braced roof; exposed decking and structural elements are stained dark oak.
- c. Tower: Masonry bell-cote, rectangular in plan, with gable roof and single pointed-arched opening is corbelled slightly beyond front wall plane

and is placed astride main gable. It is almost identical in design to a similar element on the Renwick Chapel in Oak Hill Cemetery. Bell-cote is capped by simple wooden cross.

C. Technical Description of Interiors:

1. Floor plans: Central doorway opens into narthex. Eight risers through the narthex lead to a landing from which seven more risers on either side end on landings at entrances to nave. At east, the chancel area is set upon a platform one riser above the nave floor. Partitions to either side of liturgical area probably do not date from 1866 construction.

Lower level was apparently once a single large space, has been subsequently partitioned into smaller rooms.

Kitchen was earlier in north-east corner although electrical appliances have been moved to area at south-west, under narthex, just within south door.

Passageway on north wall near northwest corner of ground floor area leads into 1898 Parish Hall, a single space with small balcony on south wall.

2. Stairways: Very narrow stairs to gallery begin at either end of upper narthex area, turn toward east on main flight of 12 risers and inward for final two into loft area. Rector's stairs in northeast corner lead steeply down to ground floor area. Iron circular stairway in southwest corner of Parish provides access to balcony from floor level.
3. Flooring: 2" oak; narthex flooring is irregular width.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls are plastered above wood wainscoting. Lower ceilings are plastered; those in nave and Parish Hall are of exposed wooden decking.
5. Doors and doorways: All doors are four-paneled wood. Two interior doors each are located at doorways to nave and loft stairways. Doorway to north of liturgical area is without door.
6. Decorative features and trim: Chancel is elaborate although not nearly so decorative as its historical prototypes. The octagonal carved wood canopy is a noteworthy feature of the paneled reredos.

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Gallery at west has curved central section; pointed trefoil elements provide decorative relief. All trim in loft area as well as pews have been painted black.

7. Lighting: Brass fixtures suspended from ridge by chains; three smaller chains suspend circular element. Only one of three of these fixtures is reasonably intact. Other fixtures are simple glass "flattened" globes.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: Grace Church faces west onto Wisconsin Avenue although it is set back 135' from the sidewalk. The site, which is somewhat higher than the street at this point, is adjacent to the C & O Canal to the north. Although the immediate area was once, during the Georgetown maritime and canal eras, in the center of activity, it is now some blocks below the more vital commercial areas to the north on Wisconsin Avenue.
2. Enclosures: The site is enclosed by a granite retaining wall, which serves as a base for the simple iron fence.
3. Outbuildings: The Parish Hall, dating from 1898, adjoins the structure to the north. West of the Parish Hall is the Rectory, which dates from 1895.
4. Walks: Cement sidewalk crosses front yard diagonally from northwest corner to small paved area in front of narthex.
5. Landscaping: Landscaping is very informal and no regular pattern is apparent. 12' high granite cross in southwest corner of site is inscribed: "In Memory of our Boys who made the Supreme Sacrifice in the Great War Jesu Mercy."

Prepared by Thomas R. Martinson
Student Assistant Architect
National Park Service
September 8, 1966